# Rock the Vote: Harnessing the Power of Young Voters



nd Ireland Baldwin dance their way to a voting booth in a Rock the Vote video. (Courtesy photo)

When young people vote, they can decide elections. It happened in Nigeria and Burkina Faso in 2015. It happened in the U.S. in 2008, when Barack Obama was first elected president.

If you want to learn how to get young people involved in elections, you probably should check out Rock the Vote. The organization has one goal: getting the youngest eligible voters in the U.S. to the polls. For 25 years, the nonprofit, nonpartisan organization has inspired young voters using pop culture, music, art and technology.

The backbone of <u>Rock the Vote</u> has been their emphasis on removing practical obstacles to voting — cutting through red tape to make it clear where young people need to go to register and when they need to do it.

"Our generation is the most connected and diverse generation ever," said Rock the Vote's president, Ashley Spillane. "We live online and on social media." That's why Rock the Vote delivers its messages online.



resident Ashley Spillane (right) with rapper Darryl McDaniels at a Rock the Vote event. (Courtesy photo)

It hasn't always been this way. When Rock the Vote started in 1990, it launched a television commercial featuring pop singer Madonna encouraging voting. More typical of today's efforts are the YouTube video in which rapper Lil Jon turns his hit "Turn Down for What" into "Turnout for What" or the video made by fashion model Kendall Jenner (with her mobile-phone camera) that nudges people to participate in National Voter Registration Day.

No matter who delivers the message, "the focus has to be on getting [youth] to channel their passion for issues into action and also letting them know how easily and efficiently they can vote," Spillane said.

A recent poll by Rock the Vote and USA Today found that in the U.S., the issues most important to Millennials (people born from the early 1980s to the early 2000s) are the economy and the need to convert to renewable energy. Spillane said Millennials do not identify strongly with political parties, but are passionate about issues. While they don't vote as much as older people — the reason Rock the Vote exists — "young people are much less cynical than people assume," Spillane said.

"Listen to them, and give them opportunities to voice their concerns," she said. "Demystify democracy and ramp up education about the political institutions that should be responsive to them."

One way to demystify democracy is to learn more about democratic institutions and the electoral process with the YALI Network's three-part online course Understanding Elections and Civic Responsibility. Take all three lessons, pass the quiz and earn a free YALI Network certificate.

#### What do Nelson Mandela, George Washington and an ancient Roman consul have in common?

by Scott Bortot



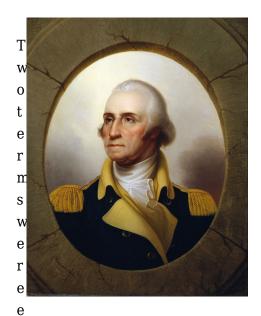
arily stepped down after serving one presidential term. (© AP Images)

What do Nelson Mandela, George Washington and Roman statesman Cincinnatus have in common?

Each walked away from political power.

The contrast with dictators who cling to power for decades is obvious. And, says Michigan State University political scientist William B. Allen, leaving office voluntarily "amounts to a humble submission to the authority of the society above the ambition of the ruler ... [and] an index of democratic character."

In 1999, when Nelson Mandela voluntarily stepped down after one term as South Africa's president, he followed in the footsteps of Roman statesman Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus (519-430 B.C.E.), who on two occasions renounced near-absolute emergency authority to return to his farm.



nough for George Washington. (Courtesy photo)

The first president of the United States, George Washington, set a similar example when he declined to run for a third term — despite being urged to do so — declaring that two terms were enough for any president. (The U.S. Constitution was later amended to formalize a two-term limit.)

Peaceful transitions of power, adds George Washington University political scientist Michael Cornfield, contribute to a nation's political health.

Reformers in over 60 nations participate in the Open Government Partnership, an organization that works to make governments more transparent, more accountable and more responsive to their own citizens.

The United States honors the South African leader's legacy through the Mandela Washington Fellowships, the exchange program of the Young African Leaders Initiative that brings young African leaders to the U.S. for intensive executive leadership training, networking, and skills building, followed by a presidential summit in Washington, D.C.

# There's No Value in Selling Your Vote



Doug Thompson)

It's a familiar sight in many countries: rallies at which political candidates shower the crowd with T-shirts, food or gifts of cash. The practice has gone on in some parts of the world for centuries, the candidates thinking well-placed money will earn them loyalty at the ballot box.

Selling your vote makes for <u>bad governance</u>, encourages <u>corruption</u> and is very likely to keep some of the best potential candidates from running for office.

Nic Cheeseman of Oxford University said he has spoken to members of parliament in several African nations who say their peers are vulnerable to corruption because of what it costs to get elected. "And the elections can cost four or five times an MP's annual salary," said Cheeseman. "So election finance gets locked into a cycle of political corruption." This corruption prevents well-qualified people who can't afford to give away money from running for office.

"So long as [you, the voter] believe the ballot is secret," said Nic Cheeseman of Oxford University, "there's a strong incentive to take money from everybody and vote the way your conscience would have directed you anyway."

Professor Jenny Guardado backs this argument. A political scientist who teaches in Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, she points to the findings of Afrobarometer, a pan-African research organization. The researchers report that across sub-Saharan Africa, voters strongly believe their vote is secret. In African countries, Guardado said, "55 percent of those who got a handout got them from more than one party." Those people will vote their conscience or "use some other guidance," she said.



erpetuates a form of politics in which leaders don't feel they need to respond to the genuine concerns of the citizens," said Nic Cheeseman. (© AP Images)

#### Why do candidates try to buy?

If you can't really buy votes, why are candidates giving away money?

"I think candidates give out money not because they particularly think it's a great way of winning an election, but because voters demand it," Cheeseman said.

A lot of candidates see "buying votes" as an expensive, and ineffective, practice. But voters should wake up to the problems they create by taking the handouts. When candidates give away money, it is very likely to increase corruption by making officials beholden to people other than those they are supposed to serve.

Cheeseman offers advice to officials facing re-election: "If you can demonstrate that you built a school for your community, your community will turn out to vote for you much more than if you gave them small amounts of cash in the run-up to Election Day."

Instead of taking cash from candidates, ask for commitments — specific promises of action for your community for which you can hold them accountable.

If you want to take a leadership role in improving your community, consider these <u>tips for organizing volunteering events</u> as well as Lex Paulson's lesson "Engaging with Candidates and Elected Officials" in the online course <u>Understanding Elections and Civic Responsibility</u>.

## <u>Engaging African Youth in Sustainable</u> <u>Development Goals</u>

As 2016 slowly takes shape, the world and many countries in Africa (including Tanzania) will start the journey to meet the new United Nations Sustainable Development Goals known as the "Global Goals". The 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) are a new, universal set of goals, targets and indicators that UN member states will be expected to use to frame their agendas and policies for the next 15 years.

The SDGs that came into effect on January 1st, 2016, follow and expand on the <u>millennium</u> development goals (MDGs), which were agreed by governments in 2001 and expired at the end of last year. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all human beings enjoy peace and prosperity.

For many African countries, poverty, political instability and environmental degradation are significant challenges to meeting the 17 ambitious global goals in just 15 years. However there's a genuine opportunity for African countries to reach these goals if African youth are informed and fully engaged in development programs that contribute to their achievement their own countries. Africa remains the youngest continent in the world, with 80 percent of its population under the age 24. Young Africans are an incredible resource toward achieving the UN-SDGs.

#### Why engage youth in SDGs: A View from Tanzania

Tanzania is the 13th largest country in Africa. Tanzania's population is quite young: As of 2014, 45 percent of the population was under the age of 15. It's the sixth most populated country in Africa, with 52.3 million people. By 2030 – only 14 years from now – the population is projected to rise to 79.4 million, and by 2050, unless the birth rate slows substantially, there will be 2.5 times as many people in Tanzania as there are today — 129.4 million — which would make it the 15th largest country in the world.

UN Tanzania Resident Coordinator Alvaro Rodriguez said, "For the first time, governments of all countries have agreed on a set of goals for everyone. These goals will help all nations and all people share prosperity, reduce poverty, and protect the planet from climate change. They will address the interconnected elements of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection."

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Chief Economist for Tanzania speaking with invited delegates during the launching of Sustainable Development Goals in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Recognizing these challenges and the need to engage youth in sustainable development programs, TAYEN-Tanzania Youth Environmental Network, a nonprofit youth led organization mobilizes and engages youth across Tanzania to solve environmental and youth development challenges through community environmental action projects.

TAYEN programs involve tree planting to address deforestation and educating youth about the changing climate conditions that affect community livelihoods, particularly agriculture which is the country's economic backbone. Today, TAYEN has planted over 25,000 indigenous trees to combat deforestation, a number one environmental challenge. We've reached out to more than 5,000 young people, engaging them in community environmental-action projects to conserve and protect the country's rich natural resources and reduce poverty among rural communities across the Tanzania.

Youth in Tanzania have a big stake on the SDGs and if left out, the journey for achieving the Global Goals will be longer than expected. Towards the realization of SDGs, a priority and focus should be in strengthening in school and out of school youth participation so that young people better understand the SDGs, but more importantly, develop strong Youth-adult partnerships in all sustainable development programs that eventually lead to attainment of SDGs at all levels from village (community), national and global. Youth platforms like TAYEN and the YALI Network of Tanzania have huge role to design and implement youth-led community action projects that provide local solutions to sustainable challenges facing Tanzania and the globe.

TAYEN members in University of **▼** Dar es Salaam

TAYEN Youth members participating in one of Community Tree planting campaigns organized by TAYEN.

# Term limits on presidents are a good thing. Here's why.

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By Stephen Kaufman

The concept of "president-for-life" appeals to some people. But for most of us, term limits are a welcome check on authority.

President Obama likely will hear some supporters chant "Four more years!" at upcoming political events. But he won't take it seriously.

U.S. presidents haven't had the option to serve a third term <u>since 1951</u>. Even before that, most followed the example set by George Washington and never tried to stay in office for more than eight years.

South Africa's <u>Nelson Mandela</u> famously kept his promise to serve only one term, despite public pressure to change his mind.

Some argue that <u>term limits</u> violate the will of voters who support their current leader and want the leader to continue, even if that would mean revising their country's constitution. However, history has shown that term limits strengthen democratic institutions over the long term and help ensure peaceful political transition.

#### Because of term limits:

Incumbents are less able to use the state's institutions to manipulate elections or erode the power of rival branches of government and political adversaries.

Leaders feel more pressure to deliver results and leave office with a positive legacy.

Individuals, no matter how powerful and popular, cannot become indispensable.

Political transitions are normal, regular, predictable events, so rival parties have little incentive to upset the system through coups or other means.

The need to change leadership encourages a rising generation of political leaders, fresh ideas and possible policy changes.

It sounds like a paradox, but even as term limits prevent a popular president from remaining in office, they promote the healthy competition needed to strengthen democratic institutions and the democratic process.

You can learn more about democratic institutions and the electoral process with the YALI Network's three-part online course <u>Understanding Elections and Civic Responsibility</u>. Take all three lessons, pass the guiz and earn a free YALI Network certificate.

# It Started with a Challenge: One Month, 1,000 Trees



ening Programme plants thousands of seedlings every year at schools in the Cape Flats area of Cape Town, South Africa. (Courtesy of Greenpop)

Misha Teasdale logged a lot of air travel working in documentary films.

But the travel didn't square with his concern for the environment. Back at home in Cape Town, South Africa, he always recycled, rode his bike instead of hopping in his car and tried to be what he calls "a conscious consumer" — someone who considers the ethics behind the products he buys.

So a few years ago, after traveling 360,000 kilometers through 12 countries for a film, he calculated the environmental cost of the jet fuel. His calculations told him he'd have to plant around 600 trees. He rounded-up to 1,000 and recruited friends to give him two months of their time to help him plant. "I love convincing people to do things they generally wouldn't want to do," he said. Once they begin, they realize it's more fun and easier than they had thought.

Teasdale's idea started small, but with an effective plan for how to spread the word.



al Reforest Fest to help return the Platbos Forest, Africa's southernmost indigenous forest, to prosperity. (Courtesy of Jacques Smith)

In the first month, he and his partners worked to raise money and awareness for the project they called Greenpop. They sold cards with seeds at busy traffic intersections that said "Join the treevolution." They got the word out with "reverse graffiti" projects (text and art created by cleaning dirty urban surfaces). They rode through rush-hour traffic on skateboards and scooters wearing superhero capes. They attracted the attention of companies as far away as Norway and the U.S., and global corporations such as DHL funded seedlings and provided employee volunteers.

In the second month, they planted trees, learning as they went. The first five trees — in Masiphumelele in the Western Cape — took four and a half hours to plant. By month's end, they could plant 300 trees in five hours.

The project attracted so much interest that they had 800 trees beyond the initial goal of 1,000, and other groups were eager to get involved. It was supposed to be a short campaign, Teasdale said. "We were going to plant a thousand trees then go back to our day jobs."

Instead, they moved forward with Greenpop. Corporate sponsors began paying for the trees and the planters' expenses. In the five years since starting, Greenpop has planted more than 57,000 trees at schools, hospitals, community centers and other urban sites as well as in forests and on farms across South Africa, Zambia and Tanzania.



stone, Zambia, highlighted during the Zambia Festival of Action 2015 (Courtesy of Marike Herselman)

Some companies working with Greenpop pledge to tie their production to tree plantings. For every so many products sold, companies pledge to plant a tree. Greenpop sends the GPS coordinates where trees are planted, so they can map them. Some companies display a certificate saying how many thousands of trees they have planted. "It's a nice tangible thing for a company to be able to say," Teasdale said.

Greenpop has become involved in reforestation efforts in Zambia and Tanzania and has "a database of projects across the continent," according to Teasdale. This July, Greenpop will host its fifth annual Zambia Festival of Action. The event is modeled on large music festivals but focused on ecological education. "I want to change the culture around environmentalism," said Teasdale. "It's not just about trees, it's about connecting people."

Can Greenpop help you connect people in your country? How many trees could you and your network plant at a YALI event? You can find out how to get involved at Greenpop's website.

The early stages of this world-changing project sometimes felt like struggling in the dirt to get the first of a thousand trees planted. What did Teasdale learn from those early setbacks?

"If you want to see your projects rise and do amazing things, it's important to look at the most efficient ways of getting things done" and focus on those, said Teasdale. "It's important to have reflective time that allows you to see where you had the most impact and where you didn't have much impact. It's very easy to have a hundred ideas, but it doesn't mean those hundred ideas are going to be good for you or bring the right audience to you or be the most sustainable options for you."

# <u>Is your election free and fair? Consider</u> this ...

# **By Stephen Kaufman**



#### (Shutterstock)

Your country's election or referendum is meaningless if you and your fellow voters don't believe it is legitimate. If you have good reasons to think your vote isn't being counted, the contest is rigged toward a certain party or candidate, or the process favors certain voters over others, why would you accept the outcome?

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, has worked in more than 135 countries since 1987 — including more than 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa — to increase the legitimacy of electoral processes. It cites Article 21 from the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the basic framework and rights that

every election should follow:

"The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures."

This helps explain why there are <u>election monitors</u>, laws that protect the voting rights of <u>women</u> and <u>minorities</u>, and the need for <u>independent news coverage</u> throughout the process.

As you ask yourself the following questions, remember voting is only one part of a citizen's responsibilities. Stay engaged, because elected officials need to be held accountable!



### Is your election secure?

- Is your polling place safe?
- Is your ballot secret?
- Do ballots remain in safe custody?



### Is your election accessible?

- Can you travel easily to your polling place?
- Are there accommodations for the elderly and disabled?
- Are the ballot and voting instructions in all appropriate languages?



### Is your election inclusive?

- Does voter registration require property ownership or literacy?
- Can women and ethnic/religious minorities vote?
- Is absentee voting permitted?



### Is your election transparent?

- Can you tell the difference among the platforms of candidates and parties?
- Are independent observers present?
- Where can you view the final vote tally?

(State Dept. / Jamie McCann)

## A Public Servant Campaigns to Serve

Allison Silberberg is the mayor of Alexandria, Virginia.

Drawing the line that connects wanting to change your community for the better and actually making that change is a difficult task. "Since I was a kid, I was taught about doing what we can for the public good, and I was really interested in public service," said Allison Silberberg, formerly vice mayor and now the mayor of Alexandria, Virginia, a city of 150,000 just across the Potomac River from Washington.

Silberberg has worked in community leadership and public service for over 25 years, including eight

years on her city's Economic Opportunity Commission.

YALI Network members will know Silberberg from her YALI Network Online Course, "Strengthening Public Sector Service," in which she discusses topics such as being an effective public servant and establishing professional ethics. In the last year, Silberberg got to live those principles in both her campaign and her election. She started as mayor on January 1, 2016.

In the primary to determine who would run as her party's representative in the general election, Silberberg defeated two opponents, one of them the incumbent mayor, who had served four terms. Her victory came down to 300 votes. In November, she won the mayorship with 63 percent of the vote.

"It was a very old-fashioned, grass-roots campaign," she said. She is proud that her staff was entirely made up of volunteers. "We stood at farmers markets. I went to as many events as I could. People hosted me in their homes, which was lovely." She spent nearly every night of the campaign season at meet-and-greets. Not all of them were well attended, but Silberberg feels the face-to-face nature made a difference. "It might seem like small potatoes to be talking to 10 people or fewer," she said. "Well, all those people go out and they [tell other people]. They ask questions, and there's no one standing between me and the people. I have no idea what they're going to ask me. It was all very unrehearsed and real."

Among the issues that appear to have attracted voters was Silberberg's insistence that officials not be allowed to vote on proposed development projects if they had received campaign donations from the developers of those projects. She has promised that her first action as mayor will be to set up an ethics commission to advise the city council on such conflicts of interest.

Silberberg remembers, from when she was 7 years old, her mother asking her what she wanted to be when she grew up. "I was sitting there with my after-school snack and my dog at the kitchen table. I said, 'I think if someone needs glasses because they can't see at school or a coat because they're cold, it would be really great to be helpful to them."

In university, Silberberg was an intern for Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy. "He was very inspiring," Silberberg remembered. "There was a great sense of mission in his office every day when I arrived. And I thought, 'I want to have that sense of mission in my life!'"

## **The Promise of Ecotourism**



lass of secondary-school students about environment conservation at Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Isiolo County, Kenya. (Courtesy of KEEN)

This guest blog post is by Jonathan Odongo, Founder & Executive Director, <u>Kenya Environmental</u> <u>Education Network</u>.

Tourism plays a major role in economic growth for countries with wildlife and scenic landscapes. In Kenya, tourism contributes significantly to economic growth, surpassed only by agriculture. Sadly, both tourism and agriculture are very vulnerable to climate change. If action is not taken in time, drought, floods, diseases and other climate change-related disasters will kill both sectors and ultimately Kenya's economy.

During our *Ecotourism and Field Studies* excursions, we witness firsthand the ravaging impacts of climate change: the melting snows of Mount Kenya; the dying Yala swamp; the receding Lake Victoria; increased prevalence of malaria; the rapidly declining populations of lions, Grévy's zebras and ostriches in the African savannah; and submerging islands along the coast, among other degraded lands and lost ecosystems.

The tourism sector is partly responsible for climate change because of the emission of greenhouse gases caused by the burning of fossil fuels during travel and the destruction of forests for luxurious tourist hotels that rely on unsustainable energy. Often tourism also generates waste that ends up in landfills and pollutes oceans with water-related tourist activities.

However, there is a solution: *Ecotourism*.

Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.

Ecotourism offers a perfect opportunity to create environmental awareness, change people's attitudes toward the environment, educate and sensitize people about *environmental* issues like climate change, and inspire them to take action.



g in Isiolo County, Kenya, learn about protection of water catchment areas and the importance of forests. (Courtesy of KEEN)

Some of the lessons relevant to climate change mitigation and adaptation in the tourism sector we share with learners and clients in the field include:

- 1. *Energy conservation*: Adopting clean energy in tourist facilities for example, solar, biogas and energy-saving stoves for cooking, lighting and warming bath water and switching off lights when not in use help to mitigate climate change.
- 2. *Waste management*: Kitchens and restaurants generate a lot of waste. Such waste in landfills generates the greenhouse gases responsible for global warming. Organic waste can be converted to compost or used in biogas digesters to generate energy.
- 3. *Sustainable agriculture*: Kitchen gardens next to tourist facilities can absorb composted kitchen waste, supply vegetables and promote organic farming.
- 4. *Water conservation*: Closing taps when not in use and installation of press-only taps help minimize waste of water. Water harvesting and storage should be a priority.
- 5. Protection and management of water catchment areas: Using forests and wetlands, through tree

planting, reforestation and rehabilitation, helps ensure water availability as well as increases absorption and storage of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

- 6. *Poverty reduction*: To curb poverty-induced activities such as charcoal burning and deforestation, proceeds from tourism should be invested in community development.
- 7. Respect for indigenous cultures: Some traditional beliefs and practices such as totemism contribute toward protection of nature, for example indigenous tree species that play an important role in overall carbon sequestration.
- 8. *Sustainable land use practices*: Promote agroforestry and reliance on nonwood forest products such as honey, fruits, fibres, resins, gums and essential oils control loss of forest cover.
- 9. *Pollution*: Use of sustainable transport curbs emission of greenhouse gases during transportation of tourists.

These practices can be replicated at home, school and other areas. Ecotourism can therefore be a solution to climate change and a dozen other environmental challenges.

## **#YALILearns: Air Conditioning, Aerosols** and Agriculture

Participants at the December 17 x #YALILearns event in Ibadan, Nigeria (Courtesy of Okunlola Festus)

With <u>#YALIGoesGreen</u>, more than 9,000 YALI Network members across Africa have committed to taking action on climate change and earned their certificate in the "<u>Understanding Climate Change</u>" course.

More than 300 members have told us about the climate events they've held in their respective countries. We want to share with you some of the great feedback we're getting about these #YALILearns events by taking a look at specific events over the next few weeks.

On December 17, Okunlola Festus and Ogunwole Omotola, two Network members in Ibadan, Nigeria, training with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, worked with GreenWealth Agripreneurs, the institute's agribusiness initiative, to invite institute participants to an event centered around the climate-change course.

Although they were unable to stream the course video, they used the transcript and <u>discussion guide</u> from the "Resources" tab of each lesson to design a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation on climate change science and solutions was followed by a wide-ranging discussion. "When the

participants discussed how they contribute to climate change, they were all shocked that by spraying things like perfume or deodorant, they were contributing to climate change," Festus said. "The majority of them committed to using deodorants and perfumes without the harmful aerosols."

They also discussed what roles they could take in their communities to curtail the unsafe dumping of hazardous waste. The topic of how excessive use of air conditioning harms the climate led to a Facebook chat on the topic following the event.

Festus said he would encourage YALI Network members planning an event to be ready to be open-minded and to incorporate the views of participants as the discussion evolves. "You have to allow every participant to be involved in the discussion — carry everyone along."

If you want to hold a #YALILearns event of your own, look at the <u>#YALILearns</u> page to learn more about how to facilitate your event and choose a topic that will most benefit your audience. Local partners such as a university or civic group can be helpful in finding a venue for your event and helping you get the word out.

Make sure to take pictures at your event, then let us know how it went at the #YALILearns feedback page so we can share it with the Network!